

THE ENGLISH LEAFLET

THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

ORGANIZED FEBRUARY 28, 1901

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THE ENGLISH LEAFLET is published by the New England Association of Teachers of English, every month except July, August and September. Subscription price, One Dollar. Secretary-Treasurer, A. B. De Mille, Milton, Mass. Editor, Samuel Thurber, 59 North Street, Newtonville, Mass.

VOL XX

MAY, 1920

NUMBER 172

ORAL ENGLISH ONCE MORE

The subject of the March meeting, "Outside Aids in English Teaching," again brought to the front the question of oral composition and voice training. With the exception of Mr. Dorey, who talked upon uses of the phonograph as an aid in teaching literature, every speaker emphasized the necessity of more time and more skill for our instruction in the use of the mother-tongue. In this connection a few further comments may not be out of place.

Almost all English teachers agree that their pupils write far better than they speak. They find 80 per cent of high school students with no oral vocabulary worthy of the name. They find fully as many with absolutely no ability to read aloud with ease or expression. They find even more with slovenly enunciation and thick, monotonous, ineffective voices. Long ago they lost faith in Elocution. Oral composition, splendid as it may be to inspire confidence when speaking before an audience, has not done much as yet to improve spoken English. There is no time for voice training. Better English Weeks only scratch the surface. What can be done?

We work under three great handicaps. First of all, there seem to be few American boys and girls of high school age who really want to speak well. Slang, explosive exaggerations, grunts, monkey chatter—one cannot call it language—appeal to them as amusing and clever. They understand each other. It does the work of their lives on playground and street. Why bother to think of better words? As for sentences—"Gee, cut the high-brow stuff, will yuh!" With even our older and more intelligent youngsters it seems to be just a little in bad form, not quite in good adolescent taste, to try to speak distinctly, accurately, and forcibly. Among our saddest experiences are those

irrepressible groans—they may be only looks of bored disgust—from a class when some daring youth ventures to use a word of four syllables that is unfamiliar to his fellows. We are told that young people in France respect their mother-tongue; that they like to hear it well spoken; that they even have it as one of their natural ambitions to speak fluently and gracefully. We all know that of American boys and girls this is not so; but until it is, at least to some degree, we can hope for very little from our instruction in Oral English, though we multiply our devices sixty fold.

Again we are handicapped by the scholastic and business "success" of those very pupils in our classes who "speak most vilely." With rare exceptions the office, the store, the shop cares little whether a boy says "ain't" or "isn't," "yuh" or "yes." We may preach to our seniors the importance of speaking correctly and clearly in the business world; we may warn them of dire results—even of failure—unless they learn to speak decently, and then we behold them march forth from our portals, diplomas under their arms, to earn in a few months more than we ourselves. The same is true of the colleges. Whatever we may think at times of the entrance examinations, we must all admit that they have vastly improved the written English of high school students. To pass the Entrance Board test a boy simply must learn to write his mother-tongue with a fair degree of accuracy and clearness. Unfortunately the colleges have not yet devised a way of testing his spoken language. The story is told that when Daniel Webster presented himself as a candidate for admission at Phillips Exeter Academy, the principal handed him a Bible and bade him read. Forthwith he read a psalm in his grandest manner, and was admitted without further examination. For the colleges to test the oral English of several thousand boys and girls each year may be too great a task ever to be undertaken. The fact remains, however, that better speech for its own sake is difficult to attain; and nothing would give us in the secondary schools more immediate help in our efforts to improve the spoken language of our pupils than higher standards demanded of us and our pupils by colleges and business men.

The greatest impediment of all is probably our inability to speak and read well ourselves. Few of us who teach English have trained our voices as we have trained our

minds. We have saturated ourselves with literature and rhetoric. We read Bernard Shaw, Ibanez and the Atlantic Monthly. If we seek greater wisdom in a Summer School we take courses in pedagogy or theme-correcting or Browning. All this leads us naturally to interpret literature to our children critically rather than vocally. Too few of us realize the tremendous asset in our daily work of a strong, rich, flexible voice. Ask yourself these questions: Can I tell a story to my sophomores and hold them hushed and listening "like a three years' child"? Can I explain a dangling participle or a twist in *Macbeth* in language that is fresh and forcible and imaginative? Can I read to my boys and girls so that they listen with ears and minds and hearts? What am I doing each year to make my voice more pleasant to them? (Remember they must sit and listen whether they want to or not! They cannot get up and go out as you do when you are bored by a dreary lecturer.) Am I perchance acquiring unconsciously, little by little, that chalky, formal, hard, blackboard speech which publishes me everywhere a "schoolmarm"? We all forget at times that poetry was meant to be read aloud. We ask too many questions about it. How many of us when planning a recitation in "The Merchant of Venice," instead of getting up the notes and questions on the text, practice reading it aloud—tune our voices to the occasion? In our college days twenty years ago the man above all others who aroused in us a love of reading and a true sense of the good things to be found in books was Charles Townsend Copeland. Other professors who lectured to us were more learned than he; but it was his voice when he read to us that interpreted the spirit and meaning of literature. From others of our greatest teachers, whose voices still sound sweetly in our memories, can we not learn before it is too late to train ourselves to speak and read so well that our pupils will remember us by the vigor, the beauty, the grace of our speech?

In a recent discussion at the English Lunch Club in Boston, it was informally voted to be the sense of the meeting "that oral English and vocal expression be given more attention in our classrooms, and that English teachers be encouraged and urged to fit themselves in every possible way to be good examples themselves of that grace and force of speech which they strive to teach."—*The Editor*.

AN UNDISCUSSED CAUSE OF SHORTAGE IN TEACHERS

[The following editorial, which appeared in the Boston Herald of April 20, should be read and taken to heart by every teacher in the land. We who teach English especially need to keep fresh, alert, and progressive; for, after all, the most important "outside aid" to our teaching is a vital interest in the things going on about us. "Occupational loss of charm and social balance" mean professional decay.]

When will the men in charge of our schools and school systems discover that low pay and working strain are not the only reasons why so many young men and women who would have made efficient teachers are now entering other fields? For young women especially, one of the chief deterrents is a genuine fear of growing into the so-called "schoolmarm" type.

Almost every teaching staff contains one or more sufferers, not from occupational disease, for the profession has none, but from what is no less distressing—an occupational loss of charm and social balance. Everybody knows the type—the man or woman who is mere school teacher twenty-four hours in the day, Sundays and holidays included; over-conscientious, over-precise, caring more for pronunciations than for thought, less for results than for rule, prim and stiff, fussy and dogmatic. Although this uncomfortable type is, of course, the exception, it is so pronounced that not a few observers take it for the usual outcome of continued teaching. With the boys and girls themselves, the peculiarities of such a narrowed man or woman too often pass for the very badges and credentials of the teacher's calling.

Not far from Boston are schools in which the teachers' meetings could well be adjourned every other time for an hour of required dancing or free romping in games on the gymnasium floor. All about us are hundreds of teachers and thousands of pupils who miss half the good of their schooling because they do not see that the relation of teacher and pupil ought normally to be as frank and kindly and spontaneous as the relation of a coach and his crew or of an Anzac captain and his men. Our most admirable schools are just those in which these human relations best hold their own against mechanical systems.

Superintendents and principals owe it not only to their present staffs, but to the future, to safeguard their teachers one by one against professional desiccation.

WHAT I OWE MY COUNTRY

[Miss Katharine U. Peirce, of the Providence English High School, sent us the article which is printed below. Miss Peirce's letter explains the circumstances under which it was written.

My dear Mr. Thurber:

The enclosed is an essay read by a member of English High School on the occasion of her graduation, January 19, 1920. There is so very great an interest at present in the big subject of Americanization that I fancy all teachers may be interested in the girl's own experience during the process. The subject was entirely her own choice, and in large measure the treatment is also her own.

Miss Wunsch read (or better delivered) her essay before the Rhode Island State Federation of Women's Clubs a few days after her graduation, and the reporter of the Providence Tribune printed selections therefrom. The Outlook of February 11 printed the Tribune's article, and we hear, through a personal letter, that Dr. Collier of George Washington University made the reading of the Outlook clipping the climax of his baccalaureate sermon on February 22. The article has also been printed in full in the Providence Journal.

Meanwhile the writer goes steadily on with her new work in a bank, and her only comment is, "I am glad to do something for the English High School."

Doesn't it seem worth while to send it out through the Leaflet to teachers of English? To my way of thinking it rings true.

Yours truly,

Katharine Upham Peirce.]

What flag is more beautiful than Old Glory? What music is more thrilling than "The Star Spangled Banner"? Every American knows the significance of our national hymn and colors. To foreigners who immigrate to this country, they mean vastly more. These people come from lands where there are poverty and oppression, from lands where there is not enough work and what work there is, is poorly paid. Foreigners love and appreciate America. They feel it a great privilege to become her citizens. There is one race which owes more to America than any other. That is the Jewish people, who though cosmopolitan in their adaptability, have been for centuries driven and persecuted wherever they have tried to establish themselves. To them America is a Paradise. Here, only, they breathe the pure air of Freedom and are allowed that which is dearest to the human being, *Liberty*.

The following is not something that I have read, studied, or observed; it is my actual experience. My earliest recollection is of a small hut with a thatched roof in a little village across the Atlantic, where men are clad in heavy linen homespuns, and women wear myriad-

colored dresses. This hut was scantily furnished, and contained a living-room, kitchen and two bedrooms. The furniture was rude and unpainted and the floor was nothing more than the moist, cold earth.

Surrounding the house was a small plot of land from which we earned our livelihood. Our days were calm and peaceful, but it was very difficult to make both ends meet.

Groups of men used to gather at our house. They would talk about a "Golden Land" far away, where one could make money easily, and where one's children could have great educational opportunities, and maybe—who could tell—become lawyers or physicians. How I loved to listen to these tales. Many times I would picture that country in my mind, wishing I were fortunate enough to live there. I could not even hope to enter a school in my native land. Girls did not need an education; if they could do housework and farm work, that was sufficient.

When I was seven years old, my dream was to become a reality. At last we were to sail for America. We sold our little farm, and taking some belongings we set out, with small means but high spirits, to become America's adopted children. How distinctly I recollect the last night aboard the ship! It was so late in the evening that we could see nothing in the distance but the great expanse of water below and the clear sky above. Almost all the passengers were assembled on the deck. With the happy thought of arriving at our destination, we could not help feeling the sadness which was very apparent in many of our fellow passengers. There were people of many nationalities; some were old, and some were young—mothers with small children, girls in their teens, and even gray-haired men—all with earnest gaze turned toward the land which promised food and shelter. What welcome would they receive? What was it that had induced them to leave home, friends, relatives, to seek protection under the Stars and Stripes?

Our choice of a location quickly made, I soon entered a primary school, and was very eager to become an American citizen. It was difficult at the outset when I could not speak a single English word. My first teacher was very kind to me, and did her best to teach me the language. She would not allow the pupils to laugh when I made some ridiculous mistake, but encouraged me to persevere. I shall never forget the first selection I committed to memory, "The Civic Creed," which runs, "God hath made of one

blood, all nations of men; and we are His children, brothers and sisters all." Child as I was, I understood the meaning of those wonderful words. I realized that America was indeed a country where this is true. Here no discrimination is made between Jew and Christian; they are brother and sister.

The years sped by and I received my grammar school diploma. English High School was my choice, and in perfect truth I can say that it has been a second home to me. I have made many friends among the students. I appreciate the willingness of the teachers to help me and the personal interest many of them have taken in my work. The four years I have spent within the walls of old English have not only given me an education, but have made me an American.

This and more has America done for millions of immigrants throughout this grand and glorious country. She receives them all with open arms, offers them employment, education, citizenship—everything. What does she ask in return? Nothing but absolute loyalty and devotion. What a small payment for so great a debt!

You cannot know the gratitude I feel for America. The most eloquent words of mouth or pen are not powerful enough to express it. I love every star on that field of blue. I love every stripe of blood-red and snow-white, for America has given me an education, a home, a country, and a future.

SADIE WUNSCH

Providence English High School.

NOTES

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of our Association early in May the question of finances was discussed from every angle. Increased cost of paper and printing makes it impossible to continue our present scope of work. It was deemed unadvisable, however, to make the annual dues any larger. Instead the Committee voted to issue next year *seven* leaflets rather than *nine*, beginning with an

October number and spreading the remaining six over the period between October and the middle of June.

At the same meeting the Executive Committee made definite plans to continue next year the Local Conferences, so admirably developed last year by Mr. Hinchman. President Aydelotte appointed a standing committee on Local Conferences, consisting of Samuel Thurber, A. B. DeMille, and Orren Smith. Early in the fall a meeting of all District Chairmen will be held in Boston to lay out the work for next year.

With this Leaflet, we are sending you a supplement to the Official Register of Harvard University. This bulletin contains a description of the courses in Education to be given in the Summer School of Arts and Sciences between July 6 and August 14, 1920.

Twenty-eight teachers attended a most enthusiastic meeting of the West of Boston English Club on April 27 at the Cambridge High and Latin School. Mrs. Mary Dowd's essay in the February Leaflet, "Possibilities of Ethical Instruction through Literature," was discussed.

Thirty or more English teachers during the past ten weeks have been attending the Greater Boston Conferences on Methods of Teaching English in Secondary Schools, held under the supervision of Dr. Percy W. Long at Boston University. At the ninth meeting the following notes were passed:—

1. Resolved that the Chairman be directed to request Professor George Herbert Palmer to supplement his "Self-Cultivation in English" by writing on the topic therein suggested—"English as a Joy."

2. Resolved that the Conference endorses the separation of "practical" and "literary" English in unit periods of instruction, variable in length according to the nature of each unit, but rarely of less than one month and rarely of more than two months. These periods should each embrace training in reading and writing, but should vary in purpose and emphasis, one aiming at self-expression and the other at appreciation. The same teacher should have charge of both types of instruction.

3. Resolved that the comprehensive examination represents a more desirable standard of preparation, but one which, owing to changing types of students, it is increasingly difficult to meet.

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